

# Medical Rare Book Provenance

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## ABSTRACT

Provenance is defined as the record of a book's ownership history. Its value and uses are explored. A survey of provenance practices in medical school rare book libraries found that only 21% of the reporting libraries maintain this important file. Examples of the uses and value of a provenance file in a medical rare book collection are presented. Decisions necessary to institute and maintain such a file are outlined and discussed.

THE "PROVENANCE" of a book is the record of its previous ownership. Provenance information may appear in a variety of forms; personal or institutional bookplates or owners' signatures on the flyleaves are common evidences left by earlier owners of a book. Indications of previous ownership may be as ordinary as the ink or embossed ownership stamps of individuals or institutions; both are frequently seen. Less ordinary are secret marks, coded purchase data, shelf marks, collation comments, or unusual bindings. Bindings may be marked with initials or names, family mottos, coats of arms, or may be of a personal style or design.

Certainly the most highly valued record of previous ownership is that which indicates an "association copy." In this case not only is the physical ownership of a book known, but an intellectual link is established between the owner of the book and its author or contents. Association copies may be either "inscribed" or "presentation" copies. An inscribed copy is a book merely signed by the author. A presentation copy is a book given by the

author; the more information found in the presentation inscription in addition to the author's and the recipient's names, the better. Lengthy, substantive inscriptions, annotations in the text, tipped-in letters, and other papers all add to the historical contribution that the provenance can make. Matheson ranks association copies in desirability from books with only a signature to books inscribed with additional details about the author's view of the work, or new biographical or bibliographical information, or other significant annotations [1].

Provenance is held in esteem by the rare book world in general [2-4]. Lawrence Wroth advocates the keeping of such records [5]. John Carter writes that "they should never be destroyed, deleted or tampered with, but on the contrary cherished—and added to" [6]. Roderick Cave, author of the only textbook on rare book librarianship, asserts that provenance is an "aspect of librarianship which should not be overlooked," but he laments that institutional libraries have not always been as rigorous in establishing provenance for the books they collect as they should be [7].

Provenance files are used by historians, biographers, bibliographers, and librarians. Librarians may use the files internally to maintain donor records and contacts, to reconstruct library or institutional history, and to support public relations. Externally, the files may be used for historical purposes [8]. For example, Sparrow refers to "instructive associations" that reveal authenticity, priority, and historical evidence of friendships and

influences [9]. Cave also points out that the books owned and used by individuals inform their thought and actions; he considers that to be reason enough to keep records of ownership for biographical and historical purposes [10].

#### CURRENT PRACTICE

A study was conducted to determine current provenance file practices in medical school rare book libraries. A questionnaire was sent on December 3, 1982, to eighty-three American medical school libraries that have medical rare book collections. Seventy questionnaires were returned (a response rate of 84%). Of these seventy respondents, only fifteen (21%) replied that they maintain a provenance file.

Table 1 shows the types of entries made in the provenance files of reporting libraries, ranked by the percentage of libraries giving positive responses. It is obvious that the traditional entries are those most commonly made. No library recorded all types of provenance, and some recorded only items of local interest. No library reported making records of illegible marks of ownership (which might eventually be identified). All fifteen libraries use standard catalog cards for the file entries. Fourteen libraries create the entries at the time of cataloging the book, three create them when re-cataloging books, and one creates them retrospectively. Several libraries indicated that separate files are kept for different kinds of provenance (for instance, one file for bookplates, another for association copies). The National Library of Medicine, History of Medicine Division, a frequent source of models, has maintained two forms of provenance files—association and autograph—for at least twenty-three years.

#### DISCUSSION

Provenance may have both charm and substance. However, it is for substantive contributions,

not charm, that it is desirable that more medical rare book collections keep provenance files. Provenance files can be particularly useful to writers of medical library histories, medical school histories, physicians' biographies, book collecting histories and biographies, book dealers' biographies, medical publishing histories, bookplate and bookbinding histories, and medical histories. Several librarians contacted indicated that they planned to establish provenance files, and even those librarians who did not maintain provenance files were aware of special copies in their own collections. Some examples of medical provenance provided by study participants are given here in an effort to stimulate the creation of provenance files in medical library rare book collections.

The most recent provenance of donated books is often internally useful for public relations activities. Philip Metzger, former special collections librarian, Southern Illinois University School of Medicine, says of the provenance file: "Our development officer's face lights up when I show him donors' names in ours."

Numerous medical rare book collections have used the provenance file to trace the origin and growth of a collection. Christopher Hoolihan, former rare book librarian of the Washington University School of Medicine, believes that the provenance file made it possible for him to "piece together the history of the rare book collection's formation through the identification of the several fine private collections from which it was originally composed more than sixty years ago." Sentsz's investigation of the history of the Health Sciences Library at SUNY Buffalo revealed that many founders of the medical school donated their personal collections to the library. Such studies have a real value to medical historians because they make possible the reconstruction of the intellectual and institutional milieu of a former era.

Bookplates provide evidence for many aspects of

TABLE 1  
PROVENANCE FILE CHARACTERISTICS IN LIBRARIES RESPONDING TO 1982 SURVEY (N=15)

File Entries	Entry	No Entry	No Answer	Percent Entering
Owner's signature	14	0	1	93
Personal owner's bookplate	13	1	1	87
Presenter of presentation copy	12	3	0	80
Recipient of presentation copy	11	3	1	73
Institutional library stamps	9	6	0	60
Owner's bindings	6	7	2	40
Personal library stamps	0	14	1	0

social history, in addition to library or institutional history. Plates reading "From the Pharmacists of Great Britain to the Chicago College of Pharmacy, 1871-1872" offer an example. The Chicago College of Pharmacy, a proprietary institution founded in 1859, was destroyed in the great Chicago fire. Books to rebuild its library were donated by various sources in the United States and Europe, especially Great Britain. A letter detailing British pharmacists' efforts to aid the college appeared in *The Pharmacist* in 1872 [11]. The books themselves are now part of the University of Illinois' library collections (the college became affiliated with the university in 1896). These books are of potential interest to the practitioners of social history, Chicago history, and the history of pharmacy.

Bookplates are themselves historical documents, of course. They are of interest to historians of art, design, and printing. Surely the most amusing and charming messages ever to appear on bookplates are the words of advice to borrowers. Physicians are just as likely as any other book owners to use such messages on their bookplates. For example, a bookplate from the University of Arkansas Medical Library reading "Library of Francis Garrett Bozeman" contains this quote from Montaigne: "The reason why borrowed books are so seldom returned to their owners is that it is much easier for some people to retain the books than what is in them."

The biographers and historians of the medical book trade will find provenance files more valuable if librarians record the sources of the works acquired for their collections, as well as the collation marks left by previous dealers. Many of these marks are straightforward and immediately recognizable, such as those made by Jeremy Norman, noted San Francisco rare book dealer; others are kept in code. It should be possible, through library provenance files, for a historian of the book trade to document the great books that have passed through a dealer's hands and to identify the libraries that now hold them.

Medical historians may also find interesting historical questions in provenance records. For example, Washington University's School of Medicine library owns a copy of the 1847 (second) Burlington, Vt., edition of William Beaumont's *The Physiology of Digestion*, which was presented by Sarah Keim (the author's daughter) to Hayward Post in January 1878, thirty-one years after its publication. What is curious about this volume, librarian Christopher Hoolihan notes, is that Mrs. Keim carefully excised the type line "Corrected by Samuel Beaumont" from beneath the edition state-

ment, denying her brother's association with her father's masterwork.

A copy of a book associated with a great man always has sentimental value and can often have evidential value as well. Certainly Osler association copies are highly prized by libraries today, whether merely signed or inscribed at length. Washington University's beautiful set of Konrad Gesner's *Historiae Animalium* was inscribed by Osler at Oxford to George Dock in 1909, the year before Dock came to St. Louis. Osler's comments to Dock about Gesner are the words of one bibliophile to another.

When a large number of association copies are found together in the working collection of a physician, as in the library of James Platt White (1811-1881), they suggest the high regard in which he was held by his colleagues—men such as J. Marion Sims. White, a founder of the University of Buffalo, is credited with introducing the clinical demonstration of midwifery into this country in 1850 (one of the more controversial chapters in Buffalo medical history) [12]. His collection also attests to his continuing awareness of significant advances in medicine, in that it contains a great number of Garrison-Morton items.

Association copies may provide detailed historical evidence. For example, a solid contribution to the history of French medical publishing could be made from the study of a certain association copy of *Traite des hemorrhagies* by Jacques Lordat (1773-1870). The Wangenstein Library copy of the book was owned by the physician A. Sernin, who was a friend of the author. Sernin worked with Lordat and Goujon, the Paris-based publisher, to see this book through publication. When the book finally came out in 1808, Sernin tipped into his own copy more than a dozen letters written by Lordat, Goujon and himself. The correspondence, which took place in mid-1807 and early 1808, documents text changes, financial arrangements with the publisher, and distribution of special copies of the book to Pinel, Cuvier, Larrey, and others. Even the wording of the dedication to J. A. Chaptal (the Montpellier professor physician who had become Napoleon's Minister of the Interior and France's greatest industrial chemist) is discussed.

Another aspect of medical publishing history commonly of interest to historians is the nature of revisions made from one edition of a book to the next. For this reason, copies annotated by authors in preparation for later editions are highly valued association copies. Owen H. Wangenstein's copy of the second edition of his work *Intestinal Obstruc-*

tions, chock-full of extensive annotations and tipped-in pages of notes for the third edition, is a good example of this type of association copy.

Single copies of books accumulate to become personal libraries. Provenance files are very important in documenting the contents of these libraries, which are particularly useful for biographical approaches to historical research. Sir William Osler stated it most gracefully: "A library represents the mind of its collector, his fancies and foibles, his strength and weakness, his prejudices and preferences . . . the friendships of his life, the phases of his growth, the vagaries of his mind, all are represented" [13].

When the creation of a provenance file is successful in identifying the individual books of a great private collection, a useful historical tool is created. For example, in 1914 Roswell Park bequeathed his library of more than 3,000 volumes to the University of Buffalo. Park had been appointed to the surgical staff of Buffalo General Hospital in 1883, and shortly thereafter he was named professor of surgery at the University of Buffalo. He was also instrumental in founding the cancer research institute which now bears his name. The author of more than 150 books, papers, and addresses on a wide variety of medical subjects, including medical history, Park was also a bibliophile. His library included the 1568 edition of Vesalius' *De Humani Corporis Fabrica Libri Septem*, Charles Bell's *Illustrations of the Great Operations of Surgery*, Hunter's *Complete Works*, Hollander's *Karikatur und Satire in der Medizin*, and Hirsch's *Biographisches Lexicon*. There are many other examples of books that confirm the broad scope of his interests, such as Yarrow's *Introduction to the Study of Mortuary Customs Among North American Indians*, and numerous titles on thanatology, superstitions, and curiosities of medicine. Park also left nineteen scrapbooks of newspaper clippings and printed items such as announcements, programs, dinner menus, and other memorabilia. Any biographer of Park would want to review the content of his personal library for insights into that physician's interests, and the medical library's provenance file provides the necessary key to Park's personal library.

When a provenance file has *not* been created by a library or a series of libraries, the historian's attempt to identify and locate personal collections is extremely frustrating, if not completely thwarted. The Wangensteens "pursued a neglected source of likely information concerning Lister's interests and activities." They felt that an examina-

tion of Lister's library might "add pertinent material to known biographic accounts." They began the search in the late 1950s. Thirty titles bearing Lister's signature and annotations were finally located in the library of King's College Hospital, London. An advertisement found in an issue of *Lancet* published the year after Lister's death offered a book dealer's catalog that listed the "remaining portion" of Lister's books, phraseology which suggests that there had been other books. Eighty titles purchased from that catalog were located in the Glasgow Royal Infirmary. Lister had willed 2,000 to 2,500 books to the Medical Society of London. When that collection was sold, the books (plated as the "Lister Bequest") were widely dispersed among book dealers, libraries, and individuals. Eventually the Wagensteens found thirty-four of those Lister books in the Wellcome Institute and forty-four at the University of Toronto [14]. This twenty-year search for Lister's library identified a number of titles. Some of the books were actually located, but the collection was never entirely reconstructed. Although the Wangensteens were ultimately successful in tracing much of Lister's personal library, if library provenance files had been kept, the information could have been gathered much more quickly.

#### ADMINISTRATIVE CONSIDERATIONS

The survey demonstrates that few libraries maintain provenance files and that there is no standard method for constructing one. The most commonly reported method is to request additional cards at the time of cataloging or recataloging a book. When cards are typed, rather than computer-generated, librarians often file a single card under name, and then add accession or call numbers to it. To construct a provenance file retrospectively is a formidable undertaking, requiring the physical examination of every volume in a collection. This is an expensive process, but given the many potential uses of provenance files, it is a task well worth considering.

Decisions must be made regarding which forms of provenance to record. For historical purposes it is desirable to record everything, naturally. Time or monetary constraints may limit recording to information on persons of significance or persons of local interest. It is well to remember that this considerably weakens the file, because these judgments change over time. It is wise to file multiple cards under appropriate headings if a book includes multiple indications of provenance (for instance, an owner's bookplate, a presenter, and a recipient

would necessitate three cards). A decision must also be made as to whether to verify entries. Recording only the name is simple, but could result in several entries under different forms of a person's name.

Multiple files for different types of provenance evidence are a common procedure. It is possible, however, to have a single file, alphabetical by name, followed by a descriptive designation in parentheses; for example: Osler (bookplate), Osler (signature), Osler (recipient), Osler (binding, armorial).

Provenance notes should definitely be entered on the main set of cards. They should consistently use standard terminology. For example, various phrases—presentation copy, signed presentation copy, author's signed presentation copy, and author's signed presentation copy to A. Vesalius—are used to distinguish different levels of presentation copies. The notes should follow standard cataloging requirements whenever possible. Medical libraries that are converting to online bibliographic control systems can choose to set up the provenance notes and files as local or internal records.

#### SUMMARY

Although the established authorities of the rare book world assert the importance of recording provenance, most medical school rare book collections still do not have such a file. Specific examples of medical provenance demonstrate that the systematic recording of provenance in rare book collections can provide a valuable research tool. It is hoped that this demonstration and review of

administrative considerations will encourage the creation of provenance files in medical rare book collections.

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